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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MINSK 000448

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#)

SUBJECT: ELECTION OBSERVERS REMAIN IN JAIL, OTHER ACTIVISTS
FACE PROBLEMS

REF: A. MINSK 192

[1](#)B. MINSK 224

[1](#)C. MINSK 365

[1](#)D. MINSK 403

[1](#)E. MINSK 442

Classified By: AMBASSADOR GEORGE KROL FOR REASONS 1.4 (B,D)

[1](#)1. (U) Summary: Opposition activists are still coping with security service harassment and fighting court cases based on nefarious charges. Authorities extended the pre-trial detention of election observers of the NGO Partnership by another two months. They are still not allowed to meet with relatives. Authorities are searching for opposition activist Vyacheslav Sivchik, leader of the October Square tent city who evaded arrest on March 29, and are not afraid to harass Sivchik's mother to aide in their search. United Civic Party (UCP) leader and senior Ten Plus Coalition member Anatoly Lebedko was recently fined for using obscenities prior to the March presidential elections. Other activists are in jail, awaiting trial, have been fined for participating in demonstrations or using obscenities, or are facing draft evasion charges. One incident showed that repressive tactics in universities might have a reverse effect. Students, disobeying the "suggestions" from the university administration, refused to humiliate a fellow classmate for her political beliefs and held a demonstration of solidarity, resulting in 11 students being briefly detained. End Summary.

Detention Extended for Partnership

[1](#)2. (U) Authorities on April 21 extended the pre-trial detention of independent election observers of the NGO Partnership Nikolai Astreika, Timafei Dranchuk, Enira Bronitqkaya, and Aleksandr Shalaika by two months. The four activists were arrested on February 22 for operating an organization that allegedly violated the rights of Belarusians and were later implicated by Chief of the BKGB Stepan Sukharenko in an alleged terrorist plot (refs A, B). Under Belarusian law, suspects can only be held without trial for two months, but authorities are able to extend detentions in two-month increments for up to 18 months pending the completion of an investigation.

[1](#)3. (U) The election observers remain in the BKGB's custody. They are allowed to send letters and receive parcels once every two weeks and conduct money transfers (no more than USD 25) once a month, but they are generally not allowed to meet with relatives. On April 18, authorities made an exception and allowed Dranchuk a two-hour meeting with his wife, Volha, who recently had a baby. Volha later told reporters Dranchuk

looked distressed, had lost weight, and doubted he would be released soon. Authorities have still not announced the date of their trials.

Police Searching For Activist

14. (U) Authorities are still searching for opposition activist Vyacheslav Sivchik and his brother Konstantin. Sivchik was arrested on March 23 near October Square, beaten, and taken to a hospital with a head injury. As Sivchik was leaving the hospital on March 29, plainclothes officers tried to arrest him for petty hooliganism. Sivchik's brother and supporters at the scene helped Sivchik into a car and prevented the authorities from pursuing (ref C).

15. (C) On April 18, security services attempted to enter an apartment belonging to Sivchik's mother, Galina, on the pretext that her burglar alarm had gone off. Galina refused the police entry and called reporters. Several minutes later, plainclothes officers flooded her stairwell and cut the electricity to her apartment. Galina did not open the door and called an electrician who restored the power. Opposition activist Valery Shukin, wife of jailed presidential candidate Aleksandr Kozulin, Irina, and reporters arrived to witness riot police and security forces pounding on Galina's door demanding to be let in. Galina finally allowed the district police officer to search her apartment. He explained they were looking for her son, who was a "dangerous criminal." The security forces left soon afterwards and did not produce a warrant. Galina told Ambassador on April 24 that Sivchik and his brother were both hiding in separate locations and she had not spoken to either one since March 23.

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Seven Years For Graffiti

16. (U) Artur Finkevich, a youth activist arrested on January 30 for spraying political graffiti on buildings in Minsk, is still in jail and facing serious charges. Authorities are charging Finkevich with malignant hooliganism and intentional destruction to property. If convicted of the latter, Finkevich could face seven to 12 years in jail. The human rights monitoring NGO Vyasna appealed to opposition groups to use all possible mechanisms to prevent Finkevich's conviction. The trial date has not been announced, but will occur sometime in May.

Draft Evasion Charges

17. (U) Zubr activist Nikita Sasim will stand trial in Baranovichy on May 4 for evading the draft, despite having a legal waiver granted to him in September 2005 after security services beat the young activist and caused head injuries. He could face up to three years in prison for his "crime," which many view as politically motivated (ref D). Igor Kulei, stepson of the Ten Plus Coalition presidential candidate Aleksandr Milinkevich, is also being charged with draft evasion. A Milinkevich spokesperson called the charges against Kulei baseless and fabricated, since Kulei received a waiver in 2005 due to pneumonia.

Students Refuse to Recant Classmate, Some Arrested

18. (U) Eleven students were arrested on April 19 during a demonstration in front of the Belarusian State Economic University (BSEU) in support of Tatiana Dzyadok, a student of the tourism department at BSEU who was detained when security forces razed the tent city on October Square on March 24. Following Dzyadok's release, the BSEU administration demanded she publicly "repent" for her actions in front of her

classmates, who were also asked to "denounce" her. Dzyadok and her classmates refused and, as a result, she was summoned to the BSEU administration. However, before her meeting with BSEU authorities was to begin, approximately 80 students from other universities gathered in front of BSEU to support Dzyadok. Police cordoned off entrances to the building and briefly detained 11 demonstrators.

The Favorite Obscenities Charge

¶9. (U) Police officers on April 21 arrested Belarusian correspondent for the Russian newspaper Kommersant Vadim Dovnar and held him for six hours. Police arrested Dovnar and an associate as they walked past the Presidential Administration. The police at first claimed Dovnar insulted President Lukashenko but then accused him of using obscenities near the Presidential Administration while intoxicated. Dovnar considered the incident the GOB's revenge for his coverage of the post-election opposition protests in March. His trial is to begin on April 26.

¶10. (U) A Minsk judge on April 25 fined leader of the UCP Anatoly Lebedko USD 32 dollars for using obscenities prior to the March presidential elections. According to the arresting officer, Lebedko used slanderous remarks against Lukashenko, the government, and police officers. Lebedko called the accusations "a lie" and asked for testimony from other officers who were at the scene. However, the other officers claimed to be "too busy" to attend the trial.

Activist Arrested For Future Crime

¶11. (U) Head of Milinkevich's Gomel campaign headquarters Vladimir Katsora on April 18 was arrested and sentenced to 10 days in jail for allegedly organizing an unsanctioned meeting. He has since gone on a hunger strike. Katsora was organizing an April 25 demonstration in Gomel to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the Chernobyl tragedy before he was arrested. However, he had already applied for permission to hold the demonstration with the Gomel Regional Executive Committee on April 7. On April 20, colleague Vladimir Sekerko received a letter from the Gomel City Executive Committee, not the Regional Committee, claiming that it had no jurisdiction to grant permission for demonstrations.

Authorities Preventing Participation in Chernoby Demonstration

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¶12. (U) Grodno authorities on April 24 summoned local opposition activists to appear at the city's military enlistment and registration office on April 26, the day of the Chernoby march in Minsk (ref E). Belarusian Free Trade Union activist and Grodno City Soviet member Sergei Antusevich, who was planning to be in Minsk for the demonstration, received a summons to visit the office for a document check and was warned that failure to appear would result in a three-month jail sentence. Antusevich stressed he is exempt from participating in reservists' training camps since he is a member of the Grodno City Soviet. Grodno journalist and Radio-Electronics Union (REP) member Ivan Roman was summoned and reported that other opposition activists received the same notice.

Kozulin's Troubles Mount

¶13. (U) The GOB has charged Kozulin's lawyer, Igor Rinkevich, with hooliganism for allegedly committing a "hooligan act" on March 2 near the October police station in Minsk. According to Kozulin's press secretary Nina Shidlovskaya, Rinkevich will appear in court on April 26. Pro-opposition website Charter 97 reported on April 24 that Kozulin's nephews are

also facing harassment. One was fired from his job and the other, a five-year law student, is being sent to Khoniki, a town in the heart of the Chernobyl-affected zone to work for two years as part of his "repayment" to the GOB for a "free" education.

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